

Request to the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee to amend the heritage designation on the organ at St. Vincent's Orthodox Church Building (formerly the 3rd Avenue United Church).

The organ at St. Vincent's is a recognizable piece of history for many people in Saskatoon who have visited the church for various concerts and church services. When St. Vincent's bought the church, we understood the obligations we have in regard to the heritage status of the building and the organ. We were told that it was the original instrument from the time that the church was built. Despite the fact that our Orthodox worship never uses musical instruments, we also agreed to a special stipulation by the sellers asking us to allow organ concerts in the church. We understood that residents of Saskatoon would like to hear the organ played in its original environment with the special acoustics for which it was designed. That, after all, was the reason it was designated a heritage item; not so much as an item to be seen but to be heard.

We subsequently learned that the organ is not, in fact, the original. Rather, many of the pipes were replaced, and it has undergone two comprehensive revamps. According to the Vice President of Casavant (the original manufacturers), the original 1913 organ was majorly overhauled in the 1950's, and again in the 1980's. Other than what you see (the facade pipes and surrounding casework), most of the rest is not original (including the console). The bylaw protects a "Casavant" organ, but that is not an accurate description of what we have. As a historical artifact whose primary value is its sound, it is in fact not a one-hundred year old artifact, but is much younger, both physically and auditorily.

We discovered that the organ had not had any maintenance for several years prior to our purchase of the building. The musical quality of the organ has been severely compromised to the point where a concert would not be enjoyable, not to mention several out of tune pipes. Oftentimes, when it is simply turned on, a single pipe loudly plays, and can only be turned off by climbing into the bowels of the pipes and turning it off manually. The console is old and slowly degrading, and when it stops working the organ cannot be played. We also learned that the United Church obtained a quote about eight years ago from an organ specialist to restore the pipes. The cost at that time was estimated to be \$80,000, and today would likely be close to twice that much. As a church we don't use the organ, so it isn't a budget priority, especially as it is competing with more pressing needs such as replacing the roof. We could never afford that, but the opportunity to have the organ fixed at that price is now gone anyway. The quote was given by a local organ specialist who is no longer in business. Restoring the organ to a state where it could be played would now involve disassembling the organ, shipping the entire instrument to specialists in Quebec (the nearest company capable of the restoration). After the five-year waiting period which Casavant currently has, it would be shipped back and reassembled. The process would likely cost upwards of \$1-2 million, and we will not pay those costs.

As is common with most heritage buildings, ours requires greater than one million dollars in repairs, maintenance and upkeep. It is an absolute priority for us to repair the leaking roof and ice damming issues as this continues to cause a waisting away of the current structure both inside and out. A few stop gap measure have been put in place to minimize the continued water damage but they are not always sufficient and are certainly only temporary. As a congregation we have prioritized paying off the small mortgage we have on the property over the next few years. Then our repair list will be as follows, unless something else that is urgent comes to our attention, roof replacement and insulation, repair water damage to the plaster walls, wood casings and hammer beams, interior painting, repair the church floor, remove the stage in the worship space, and complete the worship space with iconography. We are also creating a plan

to beautify the church yard and make it a space for the neighbourhood to enjoy. These plans will likely take more than ten years to complete with the biggest deciding factor being funding.

Having said all of that, the reality is that St. Vincent's is not able to bring the organ back to a state of usability. The organ is therefore not even to be regarded as a musical instrument anymore, but only as a historical artifact. Sadly, there will be no more concerts, and the organ will likely never be played in the magnificent church building. How then may the organ be made available for public appreciation? How will the history of the organ be preserved, if it cannot be played?

We believe that the current value of the organ lies in the magnificence of the workmanship that went into it. The organ is unusually large and complex compared to other organs and the interesting intricate parts and workmanship cannot even be seen by most people.

We are in contact with the registrar for the Western Development Museum, and are exploring whether the museum might be interested in receiving the organ into their collection. Since the museum is not only a venue for housing artifacts, but also a place where visitors come to learn, the organ presents a unique opportunity for visitors to see and appreciate the craftsmanship involved in the art of organ building. We are therefore asking that the heritage committee give consideration to our position, and find a way to allow the organ to be moved, including the façade.

Our position is that the organ was designated a heritage item for two reasons. The first was because it was believed to be a musical instrument of such venerable age. And the second reason was to require it to be in its original location in order to be heard with the acoustics of the room. That is no longer possible. We also believe that the organ has been so changed, that it should not be considered the original Casavant organ.

Fr. Herman Fields and the Building Committee

St. Vincent's Orthodox Church



A traditional Orthodox worship space



The worship space that was Third Avenue United and our current worship space.



Our vision for our worship space.